



Alternative Certification Model 2020–21: National QA Exercise Key Messages

Subject	Human Biology
Level	Higher

This report provides information on themes emerging from the national quality assurance exercise, which is part of the Alternative Certification Model for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

A sample of candidates' assessed work from selected centres was reviewed to determine whether assessment was in line with the national standard. The evidence submitted may have been partial or incomplete and is unlikely to have represented all of the evidence that will be gathered to allow the centre to determine a provisional result.

The centres selected for review in this subject and at this level have been provided with specific feedback on the evidence that they submitted. The comments below highlight key points about the assessment approaches and instruments used and the sampled centres' assessment judgements, for all centres delivering the subject at this level to reflect upon and make any appropriate adjustments.

Section 1: Comments on approach to assessment

Most of the evidence submitted from centres was partial, with only one centre submitting complete evidence covering all areas in the Higher Human Biology Course Specification. Most centres indicated that the SQA 2020–21 paper would be used to determine candidates' provisional results. Some centres indicated that they would use the SQA 2020–21 paper with other assessments to help them form a holistic judgement to determine provisional results.

Centre-devised assessments mainly consisted of a mixture of SQA past paper questions and commercially produced questions. Some centres elected to use a commercially produced paper in its entirety. Many centres showed good practice in amending and modifying the associated marking instructions in line with national standards. Modifications were often clearly annotated following professional dialogue between colleagues within centres and local authorities.

Many centres documented the course coverage of their assessments and the balance of demonstrating knowledge, applying knowledge, skills and grade 'A' marks. However, many of these assessments did not fully meet with the criteria in the SQA question paper brief.

It is the responsibility of centres to ensure that any centre-devised or commercially produced papers meet the SQA question paper brief and are in line with the information in the current course specification. Centres should ensure that their assessments have the correct balance and level of demand, and that their cut-off scores are appropriate.

Many centres showed good practice in modifying marking instructions so that they matched current SQA practice. This is important because in older SQA past paper questions one mark was often awarded for two correct responses. Current practice is to award one mark for one distinct correct response. Centres should ensure that any older questions used only examine content from the current course specification. Centres should also make sure that marking instructions are in line with current marking practice, as shown in the SQA Understanding Standards materials.

In some evidence submitted there were issues with the marking instructions for the extended-response questions. They often contained too many points for the available marks, or the number of points was not the same between the two question choices. The number of points must be the same for the two extended-response question choices, for example 8 marks from 13 points.

Older past paper extended-response questions often have more answer options than is current practice. Some extended-response questions have too many marks awarded for one-word answers, rather than descriptions or expanded points. Centres should modify these if they use them.

Several centres indicated the cut-offs that they would use for each assessment. Good practice was evident where centres had taken account of the level of demand of the assessment(s) to determine appropriate cut-off scores.

Centres should note that SQA unit assessment support (UAS) packs can only be used to support provisional results at grade 'C' as they do not assess beyond grade 'C'. They cannot be used as the only evidence to determine a provisional result.

Most centres should be commended on the detailed and effective moderation procedures they undertook, which included standardisation of marking instructions, cross-marking and collaboration with colleagues in other centres and local authorities. Some centres provided moderation policy documents that clearly detailed the steps undertaken to sample, cross-mark and moderate evidence. This is excellent practice.

Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

In most centres reviewed, assessment judgements were valid, consistent, reliable and in line with national standards. The standard of marking was high, with only a few centres applying the marking instructions leniently or severely. Where there was evidence of lenient or severe marking, it was mostly identified during cross-marking procedures.

Many centres showed good practice when marking extended-response questions by using annotated ticks to indicate the marks awarded. Doing this makes it easier for centres to check where marks are awarded and prevents more than one mark being allocated to a point. It also prevents the over-allocation of marks when the extended-response marking instructions are subdivided into sections, with a maximum number of marks for each section.

Centres should note that provisional results must be based on demonstrated attainment.